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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8653
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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1470
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0606
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000056

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LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: PREL KPKO ER ET

SUBJECT: UNMEE: CONFRONTING SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

REF: A) 2006 STATE 204157 B) 2006 ASMARA 755 C)
ASMARA 814

Classified By: CDA Jennifer McIntyre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) The following is in response to reftel A.

¶2. (C) Since the establishment of the UN Peacekeeping Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2001, there have been few reported incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse and trafficking in persons within Eritrea. UNMEE Chief Legal Counsel Franklyn Baikargbo and UNMEE Human Rights Officer Monyluak A. Kuol recounted to Poloff three substantiated incidents of sexual exploitation. They stated there had been no incidents of human trafficking, and a handful of cases where UNMEE peacekeepers or civilian personnel had to be pressured into providing support to children born from consensual relationships. They report one substantiated incident of UNMEE personnel engaged in smuggling since the establishment of the mission. These combined events have resulted in UNMEE repatriating a total of four individuals to their home nations.

¶3. (U) In order to prevent such incidents from occurring, UNMEE requires that all military personnel participate in quarterly awareness and prevention training. This training also occurs with every troop rotation. The length and detail of training varies depending on the availability of training personnel, but at a minimum, it involves day-long training covering HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Civilian employees must also participate in similar training upon their arrival at the mission. In late 2005, UNMEE updated the code of conduct with increased focus on sexual exploitation and abuse, human trafficking and obeying the laws of the host nation. The UN's zero tolerance policy is reiterated in all trainings and in the code of conduct.

¶4. (U) Upon receipt of a report of sexual exploitation, abuse or human trafficking, UNMEE convenes a panel to review the allegations. Category 1 claims (such as sexual abuse or assault) for military personnel are referred to the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in Nairobi that leads the investigation. For All other claims, including category 2 claims and allegations against UNMEE civilian personnel, UNMEE establishes a local panel comprised of civilian personnel to investigate. They call witnesses, take statements and evaluate the claim. If it appears the claim will be substantiated, a report is sent to the Office of

Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and DPKO informs the SRSG of the findings and the sanctions. All persons under investigation are afforded due process.

¶15. (U) UNMEE works diligently in a difficult environment to raise awareness in the local population of the roles and responsibilities of UNMEE military and civilian personnel within Eritrea. The absence of a free and open media in Eritrea compounds UNMEE's difficulties in educating the local population about their Mission. UN Human Rights Officers in the field conduct outreach to the local population and UNMEE tries to use Eritrean local staff to spread the word. Unlike the Ethiopian side, where UNMEE is able to use newspapers, radio and television to inform the local population, the Government of Eritrea's control of all forms of media make these efforts more difficult.

¶16. (C) Comment: The local population's perception of UNMEE's presence in Eritrea is basically that of a necessary evil. The Government of Eritrea (GSE) frequently uses the entity of UNMEE as a "whipping boy" and a means to gain the attention of the international community to highlight the impasse in the border demarcation process. The GSE has been actively engaging in an anti-U.S. and anti-Western propaganda campaign, which often includes the UN and UNMEE. Yet even Col. Zekarias Ogbagaber, the Eritrean head of the Commission for Coordination with the UN Peacekeeping Mission, has repeatedly told Poloff that the Eritreans have no complaints about the behavior of the UNMEE personnel within Eritrea or with the UN's response to the few allegations of staff misconduct. Conversations with local Eritreans in Asmara and with UNMEE staff and military personnel indicate that the local population, at least in the capital, has neutral feelings about the peacekeepers themselves. Gaining additional perspectives from other sources is nearly impossible, as U.S. Embassy staff is restricted by the GSE to the city of Asmara. The nine NGOs operating within Eritrea are not permitted to travel within the temporary security zone and their projects are strictly controlled. Not surprisingly, there are also no independent human rights organizations operating within Eritrea.

¶17. (C) Comment con't: Post believes that given the duration (6 years) and size of the mission (at one point over 4200 personnel), the number of sexual exploitation and abuse and human trafficking cases is extremely low. What has been an on-going problem is human smuggling, with one highly visible case in fall 2006 of a UN Volunteer who attempted to smuggle several Eritreans to Ethiopia in an UNMEE vehicle. (Refs B&C)

Other smuggling cases have predominantly involved local staff crossing the border in UNMEE vehicles. In one case, upon arrival in Ethiopia the local staff called UNMEE headquarters in Asmara to inform UNMEE staff where in Ethiopia they had abandoned the vehicle. Eritrea continues to be an oppressive society that controls the movement of its own people, as well as UNMEE personnel. As long as Eritreans are desperate to leave the country by any means possible, human smuggling will continue to be an issue for UNMEE. End Comment.

MCINTYRE